

negotiating **culture,** **economics** and **community politics**

*the Practice of Lei Yue Mun Tourism in
Postcolonial Hong Kong*

SHUN-HING CHAN, IAM-CHONG IP AND
LISA Y.M. LEUNG

— INTRODUCTION

Tourism is well on its way to becoming a key theme of cultural research. There is now an extensive literature on how travelling as a feature of globalisation is characterised not simply by interconnected-ness and homogenisation but also by multidirectional mobility and cultural differentiation; this is the socio-cultural background against which global cities, including Hong Kong and other Asian cities, undertake transformation by incorporating cultural elements into their economic and spatial changes.¹ There is also research on the local dynamics and mechanisms of tourism as a global phenomenon, research which challenges theories of a global cultural homogeneity.² Yet the intersection of media, cultural institutions, local communities and tourism is already attracting worldwide attention from the academy and the general public, and has prompted theoretical reflection on ‘contemporary’ cultural formations primarily in the Western world. John Urry and Chris Rojek, for example, invent the concept of ‘touring cultures’ to characterise a new moment of modernity in which the boundary separating culture from tourism collapses and tourism comes to be regarded as a set of social practices subject to perpetual ‘culturalization’, i.e. the process of cultural mediation.³

Many tourism studies ultimately couch this mediating process in the antagonism between the tourist industry or the nation-state and indigenous cultures. On the one hand, since the 1990s the ‘social constitution of the tourist gaze’ has become the key concept for a great deal of research. Some work investigates the cultural mediation of spectacle, landscape and display, highlighting various mediators and assessing their impact on travellers’ sense of place;⁴ studies note that most tourists rely heavily on tourist authorities, guidebooks, site operators

and travel writers, because they stay only briefly in the host country, lack local knowledge and prefer to enjoy their leisure time rather than explore others' cultures in depth. These basic conditions give rise to a highly mediated sphere of consumption within which tourists move about in the host country and consume cultural product. On the other hand, those who are toured not only play the role of object of the tourist gaze,⁵ but also actively engage in *representing* their cultural heritage.⁶ Some argue, however, that highlighting (for example) ethnic differences in the guise of a 'staged authenticity' runs the risk of cultural alienation and debasement.⁷ Authentic cultures are viewed as a rare species endangered by a commodification which turns the use value of culture into exchange value in the tourist markets haunted by commodity fetishism.

Among these studies there is, as Chris Healy argues, implicitly a sense of intellectual responsibility and authority which takes the form of 'patrician preservationism'.⁸ The new challenge facing local communities is not simply a distortion of their cultural authenticities; instead, they are compelled to *produce* various senses of authenticity and to 'resurrect' historical heritage. Despite its commercial nature, tourism can be seen as an unruly generative force involving multiple values and practices,⁹ a force not entirely disciplined by the imperatives of capitalist economy.¹⁰ The cultural dynamic in tourism is not necessarily characterised by confrontation between indigenous culture and global culture, and local agency may not take the form of a resistance mapped on to a 'site' of consciousness or to 'culture areas'.¹¹ This argument echoes Stuart Hall's redefinition of 'the local' in the post-colonial context as a matter of identities opening to new things and speaking across boundaries rather than of reiterating a narrow sense of 'ethnicity'.¹² At the same time, this new political moment or process of hybrid ambivalence¹³ does not predicate a dissolution of all identities but rather has to be understood in the context of an everyday life and a struggle that is ordered by identities and institutions.¹⁴

Despite Hong Kong's global status as a tourist city, studies of the cultural aspects of local tourism have been rare until recent years.¹⁵ Most work focuses on the relevance of human resources,¹⁶ management,¹⁷ planning¹⁸ and economy¹⁹ to the tourist industry. This paper uses a specific tourist spot in Hong Kong, the village of Lei Yue Mun, as a case study²⁰ to demonstrate how the local agents of this small, squatter-based, residential and entertaining community with a distinctive history and cultural traditions may, without making any claim to indigenosity or aboriginality, manage a local economy and engage in cultural negotiation at the metropolitan, national and global levels.

We have two reasons for choosing Lei Yue Mun as a case for study. First, it is a squatter area with a long history of settlement and identifiable cultural heritage. Yet its cultural dynamic is characterised less by its marginalised identities and more by its colonial condition in which

a local economy and collaborative politics have emerged at the community level over the past decades. Second, various tourist practices are present, ranging from the seafood cuisine provided by local restaurants to a local participatory project guided by a community service agency. Their different orientations toward tourism constitute a very interesting case for the analysis of Hong Kong's postcolonial and global transformation in terms of the negotiation of culture and economy; the tourist gaze and the environment; acts of mediation between local, national and global; and negotiation between agents involved in shaping both tourism and community life. These tourist practices have not only been articulated with colonial imagination, but are also enabled, constrained, and regulated by community organizations such as the *kaifong* (neighbourhood) associations formed by the Government during the colonial period to maintain a harmonious relationship between local Chinese and British colonial rule, and also the government-funded social service agencies that have played a significant role in promoting local identities by encouraging residents to participate in community affairs. These organizations are still 'local allies' of the postcolonial regime in one way or another.²¹ Foregrounding this postcolonial nature of Hong Kong is crucial for us to make sense of the material-semiotic production of local values in and about Lei Yue Mun, and their articulation with metropolitan, regional and global forces.²²

— THE EMERGENCE OF THE 'SEAFOOD VILLAGE'

Literally, Lei Yue Mun means 'Carp Fish Gate'. It was originally the name of the eastern passage or 'gate' of Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour, and it now refers to an urban space in the Kwun Tong District of East Kowloon where one of the few remaining squatter areas is located,²³ and where tourists, both local and international, come to visit primarily for its famous seafood. When a tourist walks through the main gate of Lei Yue Mun and along the pedestrian path in the evening, she or he will see glamorous signboards of seafood restaurants lighting up the water of Lei Yue Mun. Walking along the only 'main street', the Lei Yue Mun Seashore Road, one will find, on the two sides of the narrow alley not only the seafood restaurants, but also stalls selling all kinds of marine produce, including fishes, lobsters, shells, prawns and so on in big glass tanks. Usually there are workers or bosses standing in front of the stalls to introduce their fresh produce to visitors and to persuade them to buy. Once they get a customer to buy from them, they will introduce that customer to a designated restaurant connected to their stalls where they can have their seafood cooked and consumed. We did an ethnographic study into the process of seafood sales from the stalls to the restaurants and found that the deals made between each stall and a restaurant revealed a complex web of business collaborations within the Lei Yue Mun seafood community. The

customers can witness how the seafood is killed, and may be escorted by the stall owner to the restaurant, along with their ordered items. This is to assure the customers that 'what they see is what they get'. Visitors in a group tour would usually treat these stalls only as spectacles, getting the feeling of being a tourist in a 'seafood village' or taking pictures with big lobsters. Most of them just walk around a bit after meals to enjoy the night view of the harbour or simply leave immediately for another destination if they belong to a tour group. Individual visitors may walk as far as the Tin Hou Temple, but only during day time because the roads outside the seafood district are dim. Under this mode of seafood-oriented tourism, there is no way for them to understand the wider community where this 'seafood village' is located and from where it has emerged.

As a matter of fact, Lei Yue Mun is neither a seafood market place 'artificially' enhanced or constructed for tourist attraction like those in famous port cities such as Sydney, nor a village with rural setting where people still live on primary production like fishing, agriculture and mining. Despite the fact that Lei Yue Mun is still often represented as a fishing village in many tourist discourses in Hong Kong,²⁴ most of the Lei Yue Mun residents are not fishermen and Lei Yue Mun historically has never been an economy that depends primarily on the fishing industry. At present, there are four squatter villages (On Li West, Ma Wan, Che Ting and Ma Pui) in Lei Yue Mun, with a population of around three thousand. Most residents have jobs in different industries and services on land. Leaving aside the new Chinese immigrants who have moved in to Lei Yue Mun only in recent years, most of the so-called 'indigenous dwellers' who have lived there for two to three generations are descendants not of fishermen, but of miners. It is difficult to trace the present situation to the history of fishermen in Lei Yue Mun.

According to some of the Hakka people who have lived in Lei Yue Mun for a very long time, their ancestors came from Guangdong (Canton) to work in the quarries in Lei Yue Mun as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. This means that at the end of the nineteenth century, there were already quarries operating in Lei Yue Mun. As increasing numbers of people settled there in the 1930s, farming became another important economic activity. After the Second World War, more mainland Chinese people came to Lei Yue Mun to make a living and the quarry business became more prosperous. The Government later tried to regulate this industry by issuing licenses for using explosives only to those quarries operating with trained personnel. As for the fishing industry, since the bay area of Lei Yue Mun (now called Sam Ka Tsuen Typhoon Shelter) is small compared to Shau Kei Wan just opposite on Hong Kong Island, it never developed into an important shelter/settlement for fishermen like Shau Kei Wan. But there were still many fishermen working in the nearby waters with smaller boats. According to Mr Wong Shek-sing, the chairperson of the Lei Yue Mun Business

Association, in the early 1960s some of these fishermen started to sell their fish either from their own boats near the shore or on the ground near the shore. The fresh fish sold in this relatively close urban place attracted richer people from other parts of Hong Kong to come to buy fish or consume them in one of only two small, shabby restaurants there. This was the early mode of operation of this now internationally famous seafood tourist destination.

Later, as urban development began in the nearby areas such as Kwun Tong new town and You Tong, Lei Yue Mun became more accessible by land and thus attracted more local visitors to come and enjoy seafood. As a consequence, more Lei Yue Mun residents living on the land abandoned their farms and started to sell fish on boats. Subsequently, more arable land and pig pits were torn down to make space for more simple restaurants as the demand increased. When the quarry business gradually declined because of a lack of competitive power, and finally collapsed in 1967 when all quarries were forbidden to use explosives,²⁵ many quarry owners turned to the seafood business in Lei Yue Mun and many workers became seafood restaurant workers. The people selling fish from boats near the shore began to continue their business on land by building simple fish stalls right in front of their boats. In the 1970s these stalls, together with the restaurants (regulated by the Government and self-regulated by the Lei Yue Mun Business Association formed in 1967) still served mainly local visitors. Later, when more businessmen from the developing Kwun Tong industrial area brought their overseas customers to Lei Yue Mun, this place gradually received increasing attention from both local and international media through the 1970s and 1980s. By that time, the Hong Kong Tourist Association (HKTA), now known as the Hong Kong Tourism Board (HKTb) had begun to highlight the seafood business of Lei Yue Mun in its promotion programmes.

— BRAND CITY AND BRAND SEAFOOD: TOURISM DISCOURSES IN POST-1997 HONG KONG

The 1998 policy speech made by Tung Chee-wah, the first Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), clearly stated the vision of developing tourism in Hong Kong in the post-1997 era. He emphasised that tourism is one of Hong Kong's 'traditional economic strongholds' and that Hong Kong as a city has 'a unique flavour', like Paris or Istanbul. Tourists have been attracted by 'our East-meets-West culture, our day and night shopping and entertainment and a spectacular, yet safe physical environment', said Tung. Besides positioning Hong Kong as 'Asia's world city', in this policy speech, Tung used the phrase 'Asia's entertainment capital' to justify the Government's plan to construct new entertainment mega-facilities such as the Disneyland theme park and the West Kowloon Cultural and Entertainment Complex. However, Tung added, 'new facilities and attractive

events are key planks in the tourism strategy, but they are not the whole story. We need to look at ways of better presenting to the world our distinctive heritage ... We intend to do more promote our heritage to help develop tourism ...'²⁶

A local scholar, Pang Lai-kwan, once stated that the Government's tourism policy has increasingly pushed Hong Kong in the direction of a 'city of sight' or 'spectacle',²⁷ not only by investing into new entertainment facilities such as Hong Kong Disneyland, but also by stripping away the historical specificity of cultural heritage items—for example, by resituating the old colonial building, Murray House, many miles away in Stanley Market.²⁸ We basically agree with Pang's analysis. The so-called 'unique flavour' of Hong Kong is simply understood as 'East-meets-West culture', a very broad term that is never clearly defined in terms of its essential socio-political content. For the government, so-called Eastern culture usually refers to obvious elements of Chinese cultural heritage such as the Tin Hou Temple in Lei Yue Mun, the Cantonese opera, and so on. Meanwhile, the notion of Western culture is mostly referred to colonial-style buildings such as Murray House, the Central Police Station, Victoria Prison and the former Central Magistracy Compound in Central. To explain how these two forms of culture might have met would involve a deeper understanding of colonial history. But this historical 'meeting' would never be articulated in the form of the 'cultural tourism' that the Government intended to develop.

Obviously, for the Government, promoting culture is not the primary objective of developing tourism in Hong Kong. It is a 'traditional economic stronghold', as claimed by Tung at the very beginning of his policy speech in 1998—a speech made when Hong Kong was experiencing its first economic crisis after 1997 because of the collapse of the stock and property markets. Without the motivation or the ability to restore Hong Kong's once prosperous manufacturing industry, the Government turned to the tourist industry to save the economy. That is why the section on tourism in the 1998 policy speech was the longest in the era of Tung's administration. It was in that same year that Tung decided to appoint a Commissioner for Tourism, and he established the Tourism Commission in the following year to enhance tourism facilities and support the development of new attractions and events, as well as maintaining a partnership with the coordinating body for tourist business, the Hong Kong Tourist Board. When Tung once again addressed tourism seriously in 2004, it was also in the aftermath of an economic crisis—one caused by SARS in 2003. The discourse on 'increasing employment' was always sound enough for the Government to justify putting a higher priority on developing new attractions rather than on heritage tourism projects. The re-emphasis on the fading tourism slogans of 'shopping paradise' and 'gourmet paradise' in Tung's 2004 policy speech demonstrated a desire to meet the consumerist drive of tourists coming from Mainland China under the new Individual Visit Scheme.²⁹ This shift in the

target market from European, American or Japanese tourists to the mainland Chinese noticeably altered the tourist landscape in Hong Kong.

According to the Tourist Commission, Lei Yue Mun falls under the category of existing tourism spots requiring improvement, and the strategy is 'to preserve Lei Yue Mun's indigenous character as a fishing village on the one hand, and upgrade its supporting facilities and improve its environment on the other.'³⁰ However, this was not translated by the 2004 government policy speech into setting up Lei Yue Mun as a priority area for improvement works—unlike Stanley, another spot with a similar 'waterfront scenery' flavour. The actual improvement works done or planned so far in Lei Yue Mun are in fact quite minimal, when compared with other projects that fall into the same category. In fact, the seafood business holders in Lei Yue Mun feel that the Government has paid less attention to Lei Yue Mun than before. This has been puzzling them for some time since they think they have worked hard to up-keep Lei Yue Mun seafood as a locally and internationally famous brand, a labour which is in line with the Government's boast that Hong Kong is 'Asia's world city' and a 'gourmet paradise'. According to Mr Wong Ping-kuen, a Kwun Tong District Councillor and a shareholder in a big Lei Yue Mun seafood restaurant, it was actually with the encouragement and full support of the Hong Kong Tourist Association in 1992 that they organised the first Seafood Festival in Lei Yue Mun. Now, he said, the Government is apathetic towards this event. The seafood festival in recent years has become nothing more than some seafood restaurants offering special 'seafood festival menus' to interested patrons. Nonetheless, Mr Wong highlighted the spectacle of the 'seafood street' as an important reason why Lei Yue Mun is still attractive to tourists, besides boasting the unique 'Lei Yue Mun' style of cooking various kinds of seafood. Cultural heritage elements such as the Tin Hou Temple and the lighthouse are only supplementary to the seafood attraction there.

Amidst this perceived government apathy, however, the government did indeed carry out a feasibility study on a large-scale development of Lei Yue Mun's tourism and entertainment facilities in 1999 when Tung wanted to save the economy by developing tourism. The study was conducted in the light of the existing popularity of Lei Yue Mun's seafood business and 'village environment'. The three plans suggested in the 'Lei Yue Mun Rural Improvement and Development Plan' ranged from keeping the indigenous rural characteristics of Lei Yue Mun, to transforming it into a diversified entertainment area.³¹ But after some consultation with concerned parties, including the business operators and residents in Lei Yue Mun, the proposals have been suspended, if not scrapped.³² More recently, however, real estate corporations are starting to develop residential blocks in the nearby area, making use of the sea view of Lei Yue Mun as their selling point. Overall, Lei Yue Mun has become a site where various governmental and commercial interests converge and take advantage of, while still

assisting (perhaps in name only), the prescribed tourism development of the area. But where does heritage and rural 'flavour' preservation stand in developing these economic projects? How do the different forces, both within and external to Lei Yue Mun, contest and negotiate with one another during this process of transformation?

— THE NEGOTIATION OF CULTURE AND ECONOMICS IN LEI YUE MUN'S SEAFOOD TOURISM

When discussing the life of a tourist object in Australia, Meaghan Morris stated precisely the connecting scheme between culture and economics in tourism:

Whenever tourism is an economic strategy as well as a money-making activity, and wherever it is a policy of state, a process of social and cultural change is initiated which involves transforming not only the 'physical' (in other words, the lived) environment of 'toured' communities, and the intimate details of the practice of everyday life, but also the series of relations by which cultural identity (and therefore, difference) is constituted for both the tourist and the toured in any given context.³³

We find this a sound framework for our analysis of tourism in Lei Yue Mun. As demonstrated in the previous sections, the present status of tourism in Lei Yue Mun is a product of the historical development of the local economy and government intervention, regulation, and strategic planning in different stages and with different motives. On the other hand, local business operators have been focusing on its seafood attraction as the cornerstone of Lei Yue Mun's tourism culture, given the former's highly profitable nature. However, the process of making their once locally oriented business into a real tourist attraction has brought about a transformation in the physical environment of the community and the everyday life of the residents there. For example, in the early days, before the government had any designs (tourist or otherwise) for the area, the Lei Yue Mun Business Association was formed to fight for the installation of electricity wires, water pipes and telephone lines for the fish stalls and restaurants. Later the infrastructure for these utilities was extended to domestic use. They also erected street lamps, built public toilets and paved the first road along the seashore where the stalls and restaurants were located. In 1995, when a landslide occurred on one of the slopes of Lei Yue Mun and some of the fish stalls and restaurants were issued with a Government notice of eviction, the Business Association stepped in to resolve the conflict between the Government and the residents. As a result, both the affected seafood operators and the affected residents were able to stay on. The Tourism Commission's Tourism District Enhancement Programme in 2003 also helped with renovating the sitting-out area and repaving the footpath serving the restaurants. These not only benefit the business sector but also the residents.

However the identification of Lei Yue Mun solely with exotic seafood in dominant tourism discourses has also shaped the cultural identity of local residents. According to a survey conducted in 2000 by the local community service agency, the Christian Family Service Centre (CFSC), which collected the views of local residents (including people living there and people working there) on the area's future development, there is a tendency for the residents, under the influence of the dominant discourse on Lei Yue Mun, to take on the constructed exotic image of the village as a tourist space rather than as the marginalised squatter area in which they live or work every day.³⁴

Certainly, we need to take into consideration that the now fancy and eye-catching seafood stalls with their various kinds of imported exotic fishes, lobsters and so on swimming in big, bright tanks, and the modern seafood restaurants, have emerged from the much earlier reality of simple boats selling fishes caught locally and small shabby restaurants built on top of pig pits, which may be part of the collective memory of some 'indigenous' residents. However, because tourism in Lei Yue Mun has been so intensively constructed around the seafood business, and since those stalls and restaurants are geographically concentrated along the seashore and somewhat distanced from the residential area, the 'visual consumption of the environment'³⁵ of tourists has been very much limited to the 'seafood street' and the sea view, and not the narrow lanes and irregularly built stone houses up the slopes. Because of this the everyday life of Lei Yue Mun residents have been less subject to tourist gazing.

The decline of the seafood business since 1997 has brought about another change in the relationship between tourist space and living space in Lei Yue Mun. According to the seafood operators we interviewed, there are external factors leading to this decline, such as the general economic recession in Hong Kong, the fading of the unique position of Lei Yue Mun in seafood as competition increases, and insufficient government support. Some also attributed the negative trend to their own mode of operation, such as lacking a modern way to manage a restaurant.³⁶ One key problem that may 'scare off' visitors nowadays is the traditional way of selling seafood, that is, displaying seafood in the stalls without a price tag. This practice is seen to be a way of avoiding direct competition among the operators. But as a traditional organization, the Lei Yue Mun Business Association has no motivation to balance the interests of its members and to change this culture, but rather has an investment in treating bargaining as a characteristic or flavour of seafood transactions in a 'seafood village' like Lei Yue Mun. From our observations, we also found that the Association is not powerful enough to reform this traditional mode of operation or to balance the interest of seafood operators located in different positions along the 'seafood street', and coming from different backgrounds as more and more people invested in the seafood business during its transformation from a local business into a tourist attraction.³⁷

Sticking to their traditional mode of operation, the Association, like the government, turns to local cultural heritage for a way to supplement seafood attraction in order to sustain the global image of Lei Yue Mun. Mr Wong Shek-sing said:

This tourist spot is a bit too monotonous by only providing seafood. If someone is sensitive to seafood, he or she will not come. I think we should expand the scope of Lei Yue Mun. In this place, we actually have other tourist attractions, such as the Tin Hou Temple and the lighthouse. We can construct a viewing platform ... a pier ... a seashore walkway ... a huge Tin Hou statue on top of the hill facing the Victoria Harbour, like the Buddha statue in Po Lin Temple in Lantau ... Why do people go to eat vegetarian food in Po Lin Temple? Because there is a huge Buddha. (Interview transcript)

It is quite clear that until very recently Wong himself has been equating seafood with Lei Yue Mun tourism. As a matter of fact, the Tin Hou Temple has been standing there for more than two hundred years, even before the arrival of the current residents' ancestors. In Chinese traditional culture, Tin Hou is the goddess of fishermen, and so a Tin Hou Temple is usually located near the sea. Interestingly, the Temple in Lei Yue Mun was actually constructed by a pirate in the late Ching Dynasty, although there are many legends concerning the history of the Temple and the goddess Tin Hou. But, the local business sector's seemingly 'cultural' strategy of promoting heritage such as the Tin Hou Temple for Lei Yue Mun tourism is in fact an economic one, just like that of the Hong Kong government. In other words, the symbol of Tin Hou is loaded with historical and cultural meaning that allows the business sector to incorporate it into the project of constructing Lei Yue Mun into an 'indigenous fishing village' for visual consumption, and the Tin Hou Statue suggested by Wong can become another icon for the delineation of Hong Kong's 'East-meets-West' culture. We see this as indeed a process of 'manufacturing traditions for tourism'.³⁸

The question arises, how does the business sector position the Lei Yue Mun living space where traditions are generated? The flavour of an 'indigenous fishing village' cannot be sustained by the thirty to forty seafood business structures along the seashore. Not only has the arrival of many new immigrants from China moving in to this relative cheaper living place provided abundant cheap labour for the seafood business (while many indigenous people operating the seafood business have been moving out of this squatter area for better accommodation and jobs), but also historically the seafood business has emerged from the community and some of the business operators still own houses there. Thus, when asked about how they respond to the three plans included in the Government-initiated 'Lei Yue Mun Rural Improvement and Development Plan', most of the interviewees in the business sector responded that they would support the idea of maintaining the rural characteristics

of Lei Yue Mun while improving the facilities—meaning that there should not be mass demolition of the squatter huts for the sake of tourism development.

For example, Wong Ping-kuen said:

Our opinion is very clear. The existing qualities of Lei Yue Mun are already attractive to tourists. If one tourist destination is destroyed, it takes tremendous resources to build another one. Additionally, the impact of the existing famous brand will disappear. What's more, it would arouse the dissatisfaction of the local residents. The success of Lei Yue Mun tourism today cannot be separated from the effort of local residents in the past decades. The Government should consult local residents on how to develop this place; it should not destroy it by making whatever plans. In my opinion, the government does still want to preserve the rural characteristics here. (Interview transcript)

Wong is using 'the local residents' as a source of bargaining power to negotiate the rural characteristics of Lei Yue Mun with the Government. However, he also refers particularly to those local residents who have contributed to tourism development—meaning, seafood attractions—in Lei Yue Mun. What about the majority of those who are not related at all to the seafood business? Of course, in the present circumstances, the business sector's strategy of preserving the so-called 'rural characteristics' of Lei Yue Mun does not seem to clash with the interest of squatter residents, but what would happen if the Government wanted to clear the squatter area to 'manufacture' more traditions for tourism, as in Stanley, or indeed to make way for real estate development? Would the business sector sacrifice its economic interest for the sake of preserving local cultural heritage if they found such government plans viable for their own survival or financial benefit?

There are no simple answers to these questions. The local restaurants have succeeded in maintaining the 'seafood village' and its cultural image among the tourists. However, the 'seafood village' is not merely a successful business model which could be applied to other places. In order to understand their 'success', we cannot afford to neglect the local and 'informal' characteristics of the seafood industry in Lei Yue Mun, mostly sustained as it is by local restaurant owners with a strong historical and community background, who are still surviving in this squatter area. According to a government regulation, their premises, like all the squatter houses surrounding them, are classified as temporary structures. In spite of this, these premises are tolerated and even promoted as a tourist attraction by the Government in recent years. What makes this community unique is that the local restaurants and their associations, such as the Business Association and the Kai Fong Association have managed to gain this acceptance, strongly enough to form a local and informal economy largely segregated from the economy outside. Obviously, no ordinary company would take the risk

of running a restaurant in an illegal premise located in a squatter area, even though it is called a 'seafood village'.

Yet at the same time, its informal and local characteristics prevent Lei Yue Mun from undergoing significant changes. As Mr Lee Wah-ming, a member of the Legislative Council, has said, despite people's eagerness to push government to invest more in the infra-structure of Lei Yue Mun to maximise tourism, it is almost impossible to launch any project in this small community unless a large number of squatter houses (probably including some restaurants) are cleared away to make space for new constructions. Behind the space open to the tourist gaze and beyond its toured object of 'seafood', the restaurant operators are consciously or unconsciously sustaining a local and self-limiting economy embedded in its historical and geographical contexts.

— CULTURAL TOURISM FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE POLITICS OF RESIDENTS' TOURIST PRACTICES

Another feature arising from this situation is that a significant number of local residents have been marginalised by (if not left out of) this system of tourism development in Lei Yue Mun. While the seafood stall and restaurant operators are local residents themselves, and while they also employ local residents, these operators and employees account for only around 5% of the local population, according to Mr Wong Shek-sing. The benefits of tourism, therefore, have not trickled down to the rest of the local population. In Lei Yue Mun, two organizations claim to work for the benefit of the residents: the Lei Yue Mun Kaifong Association (KFA) and the Lei Yue Mun Community Service Unit of the CFSC. The former was formed in 1957 to replace the original Rural Committee (Heung Kung Suo) after Lei Yue Mun became part of the urban New Kowloon administrative region in 1937. KFA has always been a basis for local elites to maintain the status quo of the community and thus their economic interest. Therefore the *kaifong* (which literally means 'residents') in leading positions were already seafood business operators or elites when Lei Yue Mun transformed into a tourist destination³⁹. Thus one can say that the KFA represents the concerns of a particular group of residents whose interests are very much connected to the rise and fall of seafood tourism; the KFA has been the traditional determinant force in directing the seafood business, and even more influential than the Lei Yue Mun Business Association formed later. For example, the major tourist promotion activity, the seafood festival, has always been an initiative of the KFA.

CFSC is one of the many Government-subsidised social service agencies providing community development service in Hong Kong. This agency started their service unit in Lei Yue Mun in 1979 and it has been actively organising residents to improve their living environment in the community. Their work includes organising fire teams to oversee the safety of

the squatter huts, providing services for children and women, conducting surveys to find out the needs of the residents and connecting with residents from other squatter areas to negotiate with the government on squatter housing policies. The Lei Yue Mun Residents' Association, formed by CFSC in 1985, was considered a 'radical' organization by the KFA since the members of the former Association were more militant in fighting for their housing rights as squatter residents. Although the Residents' Association dissolved in 2001, the KFA still keeps a distance from CFSC while the social workers in CFSC try to maintain a friendly relationship with them.

However, the two parties were never connected by tourism until CFSC got involved in the discussion of the different tourist development plans suggested by the Government and by Chan Kam-lam, a pro-Beijing Legislative Councillor and a former Kwun Tong District Councillor who has been actively involved in the promotion of Lei Yue Mun tourism. According to Ms Lui Ka-wai, the present officer-in-charge of the Lei Yue Mun Service Unit of CFSC, consultation on Lei Yue Mun's rural improvement plan—including a plan of constructing a highway across the community—began as early as 1993. But the ordinary *kaifong* (for Lui also refers to the non-elite residents served by CFSC as *kaifong*) were never consulted. Chan Kam-lam went on in 2001–2002 to make another suggestion, this time to construct a cable-car route to the hill top where a military heritage site is located. By then, she had realised how local residents would be affected by such development plans, without having a way to express their opinions. She therefore began to think of using tourism projects to draw residents' attention to planning issues. Although she is critical of mainstream tourism for 'just taking "things" away from Lei Yue Mun and not leaving anything here but garbage and nuisance', her strategy is not to intervene in mainstream tourist practices, but rather to start alternative projects aimed at 'leaving' precious 'things' in the community.

The first such effort, 'Preserving the Past and Glorifying the Present—Community Construction Project' began by using various means to collect memories from different groups of people living in Lei Yue Mun. The survey of residents' opinions about the future development of Lei Yue Mun discussed before was one of the activities of this Project. It revealed that the residents identified with the characterisation of Lei Yue Mun as a seafood tourism destination: from the texts recording their stories or snatches of memory, we can see that along with places like the Tin Hou Temple and its festivities, the lighthouse, the quarries and the broken pier, the more recent emergence of the seafood stalls and restaurants and the gradual improvement of their living conditions constituted part of the collective memory of people living in Lei Yue Mun.⁴⁰ Besides producing cultural 'things' such as booklets, photo essays and a VCD on Lei Yue Mun's living history, CFSC also organised a series of cultural activities to introduce the history of other living heritage sites marginalised by mainstream tourism, including the Hoi Bun Primary School, the squatter houses and the quarries. These

activities were targeted at local residents as well as at other community groups outside, such as teachers and students.

In addition to all these efforts to cultivate a sense of belonging in the community of residents and generate cultural resources for community/tourism development, CFSC also organised two groups of residents to be the 'hardware' for carrying out alternative tourist practices. The first group, called 'I am the Boss' and given a 'self-help' orientation, began in 2001 with the dual objectives of 'helping unemployed people and low income families to overcome their financial difficulties by selling T-shirts and souvenirs to the tourists' and 'introducing the characteristics, culture and history of Lei Yue Mun to the tourists so as to help promote tourism in this district' (according to a pamphlet of the 'I am the Boss' self-help group). The second is the 'tour guiding group' (formed in 2004) in which residents are trained by CFSC social workers as tour guides, not to the seafood street, but to the squatter area where they are introduced to the life and history of Lei Yue Mun residents. The tours usually come from other local communities and from schools, universities and social service organizations who are attracted to Lei Yue Mun not because of seafood but because of the squatter culture of the community.

These two groups of residents now work together when a tour comes to Lei Yue Mun through a contact made with CFSC. When the tour guides finish their work, the members of the self-help group will sell T-shirts imprinted with icons of Lei Yue Mun such as carp fish, the Tin Hou Temple or the typhoon shelter, and a small variety of handicrafts to the tourers. This kind of alternative tourism practice, very much dependent upon the contacts of CFSC, has not brought much economic return to the members but rather the satisfaction of introducing the local culture to visitors from their own perspective as residents. As Ah Ho, a core member of the 'I am the Boss' group and a participant in the tour guide work, remarks:

We are quite different from the commercial tour guides because we grew up here. We also know the information on Lei Yue Mun known to the outside guides, such as the two to three hundred years' history of the Tin Hou Temple and its relation to the pirates. We may not express this as systematically as them. But will they know that a big vessel passes by the Temple at around nine to ten every morning, giving a great visual impact to the on-lookers? We can tell the visitors all the everyday life details of living here, such as where to buy the most delicious cake, anecdotes of staging Chinese opera at Tin Hou Temple, where we caught fish when we were small ... An outside guide can give you cold information, but we can give you warm life experience ... But we have been facing a problem of keeping a balance between the two objectives set in the beginning—promote community culture and be self-reliant financially ... In the beginning, we just aimed at selling T-shirts. But now we are changing to promote culture, telling the buyers the story behind the T-shirts. (Interview transcript)

As a matter of fact, Ah Ho and the other three core members in the Group do not need to or could not live on this 'business'. They are either employed, retired or working as a housewife. The only member who is genuinely unemployed withdrew his share and left the Group after three years, not because he did not identify with the role of promoting local culture, but because his expectation of generating income from this tourist practice was not fulfilled.

We also found that this kind of community-oriented practice of tourism also gets caught up in the conflict between culture and economy. As clearly spelled out again by Lui Ka-wai during the interview:

The original idea of starting the 'I am the Boss' Group was not for tourism per se, but to involve people in paying attention to planning issues. Since several planning issues happening here are all related to tourism, we try to focus our work on this. If activities organised around cultural tourism become systematised, we will retreat from this scope of work. (Interview transcript)

If tourism is only a means or an excuse to intervene in the planning of Lei Yue Mun, and if 'culture' is defined as the life histories of residents and the lifestyle of squatters, it is understandable why CFSC would not make an effort to turn this volunteer-oriented group into a real self-help group, or to help the members become real 'bosses'. Without much experience in running small business, CFSC follows its conventional model of organising resident associations in the community and emphasising consciousness-raising, group sharing and social involvement rather than economic calculation and the management of small business groups or cooperatives. For them, 'developing tourism' is only a tool for mobilising residents in the same way as in the 1980s. In other words, the 'cultural strategy' used in these unintended tourist practices is not an economic one but a political one, that is, to guarantee that the voices of the local residents are heard in future consultations.

However, if culture is put into a binary opposition with economy, the activities around cultural promotion will not be sustainable. Without sufficient incentives such as job opportunities and considerable income, residents could not integrate their material life with an alternative image of Lei Yue Mun. The slow development and the reliance of the 'bosses' and the community tour guides on CFSC are symptomatic of the kind of tourism practice framed by social service agencies. Furthermore, it is contradictory to the agency's objective of using tourism as a means for political intervention since, first, the agency can never retreat from such practices if the members are unable to operate the 'business' independently. Secondly, however, the residents may not have bargaining power in any future consultation related to tourism planning if they are not one of the economic forces in Lei Yue Mun tourism, given the context of the wider economy-oriented tourism development trend in Hong Kong. The 'business' run by the 'bosses' and the local tour guides may be too minimal to have much

impact on Government planning and the dominant tourism culture in Lei Yue Mun. Compared with the seafood restaurant owners, CFSC and its partner groups fail to develop a viable local business model in the community or to form a significant party in the planning and negotiation process of local tourism development.

Although this kind of alternative practice of tourism is neither an economic strategy nor a financially self-sustained activity, we observe that this also involves a process of social and cultural change in Lei Yue Mun. First, the tourist gaze brought by those alternative tours guided by local residents may result in 'the toured' becoming a *closer* tourist object. As Ah Ho shared with us:

Indeed, I myself didn't feel comfortable in the beginning because your life becomes the spectacle of the outsiders. Someone may look at you while you are taking meals. Later I gradually adapt to this as I find the visitors are quite friendly and they just want to know more about our community. (Interview transcript)

It may indeed be too simplistic to position 'the toured' as victims of tourism, particularly in such locally participant modes of touring carried out by guides like Ah Ho. The relationship between the tour and the toured differs in terms of motivation and mode of operation from that prevailing in a more mainstream form of tourism. The residents inside a house as gazed upon by a visitor coming from another community for a friendly visit is different from the spectacles of fishes, lobsters, prawns to be consumed, materially and symbolically, in the seafood street. The history and everyday life practices of people living in squatter communities may become more real and not just imagined as in terms of their membership of an inauthentic 'seafood village' or 'urban paradise'.

As we mentioned above, the KFA has been keeping a distance from CFSC whom they consider a competitor or an opponent in the *kaifong* business. So when CFSC started to get involved in tourism, both KFA and the Lei Yue Mun Business Association became suspicious of what they were doing. But Lui Ka-wai thinks that their 'campaign' or cultural tourism project has to a certain extent changed the mentality of the mainstream tourist operators like Wong Shek-sing and Wong Ping-kuen, since they, too, have begun to talk about the importance of local culture or cultural heritage. No matter whether this observation of Lui's is correct or not, cultural heritage and local culture has become the starting point and common language for the two parties involved in very different tourism practices to engage in a dialogue in the future.

— CONCLUSION

From the above analysis of the case of Lei Yue Mun, we can begin to see how the local, national and global may be negotiated in Hong Kong tourism development. Historically, as an

internationally famous tourist attraction Lei Yue Mun emerged from a very local economy that supplied local seafood for local urban consumption. But interestingly enough, as the tourist business became prosperous and fewer local residents remained in the fishing business, so that the operators needed to turn to overseas for greater supplies of more varied marine products, it was the construction of a *local* 'fishing village' flavour in mainstream tourism discourses that sustained the attraction of Lei Yue Mun seafood tourism. This combination of a local and a global imagination for Lei Yue Mun is mediated by the nationalistic design of the Hong Kong SAR Government to maintain the international standing of a 'financial centre' for this post-colonial space. The mediation is carried out by two means. Discursively, the saying that Hong Kong itself has emerged from a 'small fishing village' into an 'international financial centre' is very widely circulated in media texts and historical writings. This has provided a basis or a frame of reference for us to make sense of the tourism discourse of Lei Yue Mun. That is to say, Lei Yue Mun is represented as *the past of Hong Kong*, and this can satisfy the nostalgic feeling of local visitors and the exotic imagination of the 'Pearl of the Orient' still held by overseas tourists. Materially, the tourism development projects in Lei Yue Mun serve as part of the grand plan for the government to revive Hong Kong's tourism industry in order to salvage the area's (still) sluggish economy.

The enforcement of this 'cosmopolitan imaginary' has come up against a multitude of 'locals' involved in the tourist practices active in Lei Yue Mun. This is what makes this case more than just another study of tourism, but rather a cultural research project engaged with how 'cultures' are *played* for either economic or political considerations by different local agents of tourism practice within the postcolonial context of Hong Kong and within the complexities of the power relationships involved.

Firstly, the seafood operators (of the stalls and restaurants) do indeed represent dominant economic interests in the area, thereby gaining more recognition from the government and more say around the discussion table deciding the development of the area. They are weaving an interest-based network which excludes any competitor from outside Lei Yue Mun as well as ordinary residents in the community. However, the dual identity enjoyed by some members of the business sector (who are *both* 'seafood operators' *and* 'community residents') may also be itself an important 'agent' of negotiation when there is a conflict of interest between business and the community at large in any future change. However, the Lei Yue Mun tourist industry's traditional mode of operation and its geo-historical constraints may prevent the village from transforming into a modern tourist destination better able to satisfy the needs of the market. Nevertheless, in the process of being framed as a 'fishing village', traditions there become an important component for demonstrating 'local character'. How the operators negotiate the modern with their traditional way of running a business may be a key factor for the transformation of tourism practices in Lei Yue Mun.

Alongside such factors as the business practices and geo-historical constraints that partly explain the decline of tourism in Lei Yue Mun, it is also interesting to note the tension between the seafood operators and the Government. As stated above, the KFA is a more influential organization among seafood operators than the Business Association. Traditionally a collaborative force for the British colonial Government, the KFA has maintained since 1997 an alliance with the HKSAR Government and with pro-Beijing party councillors in both the District Council and the Legislative Council. This alliance may in fact have prevented the seafood operators from negotiating more vigorously with the Government for direct support. However, despite its political inclination toward the status quo and the elite at any given time, KFA can still claim to derive its representativeness from the locals (i.e. both from the business sector and the residents) if there is a need to negotiate with the Government regarding future planning.

The KFA's failure to recognise and involve local residents has perhaps prompted local community organizations such as the CFSC to devise ways of involving more residents in the community planning process by trying to divert the tourist gaze away from the exotic 'seafood village' and towards the everyday community life of Lei Yue Mun itself. But CFSC's tourist projects, failing as they do to generate a viable economic practice merged with people's material lives, are unable to go beyond cultural promotion to generate an alternative tourist practice and industry. CFSC's emphasis on framing and 'managing' local residents may reflect an attitude common within social work, one of imposing their own agenda of 'citizen politics' onto local 'subjects'. The idea to 'empower' local residents by reclaiming their voice in the tourist practice may even be foreign, in fact, to the locals themselves.

Our cultural research in Lei Yue Mun suggests that the distinction between what tourist sites mean for a 'global' tourist gaze and what they mean for indigenous 'locals' may be too rigid to grasp the significance of cultural tourism in a postcolonial city like Hong Kong. The emergence of a changing identity and civic politics out of the diminishing power of the West is also the background against which this research has developed. However, in the very specific postcolonial setting of Lei Yue Mun, the local tourist practices cannot simply be understood in terms of an affirmative identity politics, since as we have seen the alternative practices of CFSC (informed precisely by rhetorics of 'citizen participation' and 'local cultural characteristics') have failed either to challenge the power relations within the existing collaborative politics, or to construct a new identity for the local residents.

After all, Lei Yue Mun as a whole has inexorably become a spectacle for visitors as it develops into a tourist destination in whatever direction, and there may well be more 'manufacturing traditions for tourism' in the future. 'Culture' here is being appropriated by both mainstream and alternative tourism practices alike as they seek to achieve their goals.

No matter whether tourism practices are intended for profit or not, tourism culture looks set to become a battleground for global–local forces and complex community politics.

SHUN-HING CHAN is Assistant Professor at the Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong. She received her PhD in modern Chinese literature from Peking University. Her research areas include gender and everyday life, gender and narratives, Modern Chinese literary studies, Hong Kong studies and culture and tourism. <chanshh@ln.edu.hk>

IAM-CHONG IP is currently teaching in the Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University, Hong Kong. He is a PhD student in the Graduate Institute of Building and Planning, National Taiwan University. He has published works relating to colonialism, housing and citizenship. His research focuses on urban cultures in Hong Kong and mainland China. <chong@ln.edu.hk>

LISA Y.M. LEUNG is Assistant Professor at the Department of Cultural Studies, Lingnan University. She has published extensively on the issues around cultural globalization raised by the intensified flow of media and cultural products across Asia. In recent years, she has extended her research into tourism and cultural studies. <leunglym@ln.edu.hk>

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23. There used to be many squatter areas in Hong Kong. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, many people migrated to Hong Kong legally or illegally from Mainland China. Because of the housing shortage, many just built squatter houses on hill slopes or in undeveloped areas. Later the government started to control the rapid development of squatter settlements by registering those already existing and demolishing those huts built after the registration. Over the last two decades, many big squatter areas with long histories were swept away by the government for real estate development; there are not many left in Hong Kong. Therefore squatters remaining in areas like Lei Yue Mun

- have become a special 'characteristic' of Hong Kong housing.
24. In the Visitors' Kit produced by the Hong Kong Tourism Board (a coordinating body for tourism-related business such as hotels, travel agencies and restaurants which works closely with the government) 'Lei Yue Mun Seafood Bazaar' is one of the recommended district attractions in Kowloon. The description says: 'this fishing village is popular for its seafood and is ideal for a night out with friends. You can choose your own fresh fish (so fresh it's still swimming in a tank!) and decide how you'd like it prepared. Make sure you ask the price before ordering.' See Hong Kong Tourism Board, *Visitor's Kit*, Hong Kong Tourism Board, Hong Kong, p. 18.
 25. In 1967, a riot broke out in Hong Kong. It was initiated by the supporters of a labour dispute in one of the plastic factories in San Po Kong, an industrial area in Kowloon. Later the dispute developed into a political conflict between the British Hong Kong Government and the pro-China leftist organizations, as the labour struggle became more ideological under the influence of the on-going Cultural Revolution in China. People from the leftist camp made bombs and allowed them to explode in many urban spaces so as to threaten the government. As a result, many people died or were wounded. That was when the government stopped all quarries from using explosives.
 26. All the quotes in this section from Tung Chee Wah's 1998 policy speech on tourism are taken from paragraphs no. 44 to no. 48: <<http://www.policyaddress.gov.hk/pa98/English/econ2.htm>>.
 27. See Lai-kwan Pang, 'Sightseeing and (Inter)national City', p. 8.
 28. The 1844 colonial building in Central used to be a British garrison and was most famous in the local community for its numerous ghost stories. It was torn down in 1982 to vacate an expensive piece of land for the new China Bank Building. Under the strong urging of cultural advocates, the government agreed not to destroy this piece of architecture but to keep the sundered parts of the building in a warehouse for further action. It was not until 1990 that the authorities decided to reassemble the pieces of the old Murray House, and to re-erect the building in the tourist hub of Stanley Market in the south of Hong Kong Island.
 29. The Individual Visit Scheme is a new scheme allowing individuals from most places in Guangdong Province and some major cities in the Mainland to apply for a visit of seven days to Hong Kong. Previously, a Chinese Mainland visitor could not visit Hong Kong individually but had to join a tour group. This scheme is one of the initiatives taken by the Beijing administration to help Hong Kong to re-vitalise its tourist business as well as the whole economy severely stricken by SARS in 2003.
 30. Hong Kong Tourism Commission, 'Replies to Questions Raised by Lingnan University on Lei Yue Mun', Hong Kong Tourism Commission, Hong Kong, 2005.
 31. The 'Lei Yue Mun Rural Improvement and Development Plan', initiated by the Planning Department and carried out by an environmental resource management consultant firm in 1999, suggested three plans to develop tourism in Lei Yue Mun. They were, first, to preserve the traditional rural characteristics of Lei Yue Mun and to improve the environmental and basic facilities; second, together with Yau Tong industrial area, to develop the northern part of Lei Yue Mun into a commercial, recreational and residential area while keeping the rural characteristics of the southern part; and third, to increase the tourist characteristics and recreational facilities in Lei Yue Mun, including constructing a seashore walkway, big-scaled in-door recreational facilities and an urban park.
 32. This may be partly due to the conflict aroused by a plan of constructing a highway across Lei Yue Mun to Cheung Kwan O, a newly developed town in the East Kowloon, within this 'Lei Yue Mun Rural Improvement and Development Research'. There were objections among the residents and the business sector in Lei Yue Mun because the highway would divide the area into two halves, destroying the authenticity and originality of Lei Yue Mun. Later, the Government abandoned this plan, and thus the whole development plan had to be re-considered.
 33. Meaghan Morris, 'Life as a Tourist Object in Australia', pp. 180–1.
 34. When asked about the characteristics of Lei Yue Mun, 53.6% of the 295 interviewees mentioned the seafood stalls and restaurants (compared to 37.6% for Tin Hou Temple, 30.5% for the lighthouse, and 15.9% for the squatters). See Christian Family Service Centre, *Treasure the Past and Glorify the Present* (in Chinese), Lei Yue Mun Service Unit, Christian Family Service Centre, Hong Kong, 2001, p. 11.
 35. John Urry, 'The Tourist Gaze and the Environment', *Consuming Places*, Routledge, London, 1995, pp. 173–92.
 36. These viewpoints are expressed by Mr Yip Pak-keung, Ms Yuen Kam-ying, owner of a

famous fish stall and a seafood restaurant, Mr Wong Ping Kuen, manager of a seafood restaurant and a Kwun Tong District Councillor, and Mr Wong Shek-sing, chairperson the Lei Yue Mun Business Association.

37. Tai Fat Hou is the only seafood restaurant that has modernised its operation by improving the hygiene, environment and service of the restaurant and improving the management skills of its personnel. (Tai Fat Hou is also the only restaurant in Lei Yue Mun that has a website.) However during the interview with Ms Lee, when asked about her impression of the Lei Yue Mun Business Association, Ms Lee expressed a kind of contempt and a gesture of distancing from the Association.

38. Meaghan Morris, 'Life as a Tourist Object in Australia', p. 181.

39. For example, one of our interviewees, Mr Law Shing-hing is now the deputy chair of the Lei Yue Mun Kai Fong Association. He owns five restaurants and stalls in Lei Yue Mun and other places. His father was one of the indigenous residents who first sold seafood on boats in Lei Yue Mun. Another interviewee, Mr Lui Tung-hai, is the secretary of the Association. He is now an elected District Councillor in Kwun Tong.

40. See Christian Family Service Centre, *Treasure the Past and Glorify the Present*; and Christian Family Service Centre, *Looking for the Stories of Lei Yue Mun* (in Chinese), Lei Yue Mun Service Unit, Christian Family Service Centre, Hong Kong, 2002.